

American

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State Department Official and Lawmakers Discuss Libya Crisis

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. Lawmakers discussed U.S. policy toward Libya — its implications for America and the Middle East and North Africa region — with Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg at a House Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing March 31.

Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (Republican-Florida), chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, led the hearing and said that Americans question if involvement in the Libyan crisis may signal U.S. action in other countries experiencing turmoil, such as Côte d'Ivoire or Syria.

"Another area of concern is the scope, duration and objectives of the NATO-led operation and the political mission, that have not been sufficiently defined, nor have the anticipated short-, medium- and long-term commitments of the United States," Ros-Lehtinen said.

Steinberg said that the Obama administration's decision to work with the international community and support U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973 has prevented a massacre of Libyan civilians by Colonel Muammar Qadhafi's security forces.

"All of this has been accomplished consistent with President Obama's pledge to the American people that our military role would be limited, that we would not put ground troops into Libya," Steinberg said.

As the situation in Libya unfolded quickly, Steinberg said President Obama acted decisively in working with the international community.

"As his troops headed toward Benghazi, Qadhafi again defied the international community, declaring, 'We will have no mercy and no pity,'" Steinberg said. "Based on his decades-long history of brutality, we had little choice but to take him at his words."

"As NATO assumes command and control of the military operations, we are confident that the coalition will keep the pressure on Qadhafi's remaining forces until he fully complies with Resolution 1973," Steinberg said.

Representative Howard L. Berman (Democrat-California), ranking member of the committee, said the burden of military action is being shared among U.S. allies, including some Arab countries. Action taken by the international community against the Qadhafi regime, he said, can help prevent instability that could derail

democratic transformation in nearby countries.

"Libya's neighbors, Tunisia and Egypt, have just gone through revolutions that are changing the nature of the region, hopefully for the better," Berman said. "If Libya were to spin out of control and instability were to pour over its borders, the entire region would suffer."

Steinberg discussed nonmilitary aspects of U.S. strategy on Libya, which include relief operations and continued pressure on the Qaddafi regime.

"We are working with NATO, the EU, the U.N. and other international organizations to get aid to people who need it," Steinberg said, adding that the U.S. government has provided \$47 million to meet humanitarian needs.

Steinberg said that the recently formed Libyan Contact Group, a coalition of Arab and non-Arab representatives that will lead efforts to map out Libya's future, is exerting pressure on the Qadhafi regime.

"The contact group on Monday sent a strong international message that we must move forward with a representative democratic transition and that Qadhafi has lost the legitimacy to lead and must go," Steinberg said.

Stressing the importance of U.S. involvement in ending the Libyan crisis, Steinberg said a lack of action would send the wrong message to those who oppose democracy in the region.

"It would undercut democratic aspirations across the region and embolden repressive leaders to believe that violence is the best strategy to cling to power," Steinberg said. "It would undermine the credibility of the Security Council and our ability to work with others to uphold peace and security."

U.S. Combats Growing Global Problem of Maritime Piracy

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States has adopted a multilateral approach to deal with the "significant and urgent" problem of maritime piracy, a growing challenge with global implications, says Assistant Secretary of State Andrew Shapiro.

"We live in an era of complex and integrated global supply chains where people in countries around the world depend on safe and reliable shipping lanes for their food, their energy, their medicine and basic consumer goods. By threatening one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, piracy off the Horn of Africa threatens not just specific ships, but has broader strategic implications,"

Shapiro said March 30 in remarks in Washington at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Maritime piracy costs the global economy between \$7 billion and \$12 billion annually, according to a December 2010 report from the U.S.-based One Earth Future Foundation. The group totaled the estimated costs of paying ransoms with the increased costs of insurance premiums, re-routing ships, security equipment, naval forces to combat piracy, prosecutions of pirates, piracy-deterrent organizations and the impacts on regional economies.

Shapiro, who is the State Department's assistant secretary for political-military affairs, said that since January 2010 pirates working from ports in Somalia have received approximately \$75 million to \$85 million in ransom payments. He stressed that the international community must find a way "to shut down this ballooning criminal enterprise that makes piracy an increasingly lucrative profession, especially for the impoverished Horn of Africa."

According to a United Nations report released in January, Somalia's "piracy-driven economy is gradually overtaking the traditional economy, owing to the development of activities on land in support of the pirates, the lack of job-creating investments in a context of widespread insecurity and the destructive effect of piracy on Somali society."

Shapiro called the state failure in Somalia "the root cause of piracy," and emphasized the problem cannot be resolved exclusively through naval patrols and interdictions.

"There will be no end to piracy at sea until there is both political reconciliation and economic recovery on the ground in Somalia and a local government capable of and willing to enforce law and order on land and offshore. Achieving stability and good governance in Somalia represents the only sustainable long-term solution to piracy," he said.

The United States is working with others in the international community to help build governance, security and economic livelihoods throughout Somalia.

However, Shapiro added, addressing "the challenge of the situation ashore does not preclude progress at sea." The international community "can make advances in combating piracy, irrespective of the situation in Somalia."

Shapiro outlined several approaches the United States has identified to combat piracy in the near term.

"These center on four key areas: pursuing additional mechanisms to prosecute and incarcerate pirates; aggressively targeting those who organize, lead and profit from piracy operations; exploring expanded military options that will not place undue risks or burdens on our armed forces; and intensifying efforts to encourage the shipping industry to employ best-management practices," he said.

Shapiro emphasized the importance of implementing these anti-piracy measures immediately, as he said the problem is rapidly growing worse.

"Last year, 2010, witnessed the highest number of successful pirate attacks and hostages taken on record. And thus far, 2011 is on track to be even higher," he said. Nearly 600 mariners from around the world are being held hostage, some for as long as six months.

While much work remains in the coming months and years, Shapiro expressed confidence that through the shared commitment of the United States and the international community, "the challenge of modern-day piracy is one that we will surely meet."

The Prague Agenda: The New START's Next Steps

By Sally Rountree
Staff Writer

Washington — The New START treaty not only represents a commitment by the United States and Russia toward nuclear disarmament, but also strengthens the reset between Washington and Moscow "that is helping us to address the most urgent proliferation threats we face in Iran and North Korea," National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon says.

The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), signed April 8, 2010, by President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, marks the first major arms reduction pact since the last days of the Cold War.

Keynoting the Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference meeting in Washington on March 29, Donilon outlined the next steps to establish missile-defense cooperation.

Referencing President Obama's vision for achieving the "peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons" in a speech the president delivered in Prague in 2009, Donilon presented the Obama administration's plans to advance each of the four dimensions of the president's agenda.

To reduce the number and role of nuclear weapons, the United States recently exchanged data with Russia on nuclear facilities under the auspices of the Bilateral

Consultative Commission, the treaty's implementing body, currently meeting in Geneva. On-site inspections conducted under the treaty will soon follow. Once the treaty is fully implemented, Donilon said, it will mark the lowest number of deployed nuclear warheads since the 1950s, the first full decade of the nuclear age.

The administration's next agreement with Russia should include nondeployed and nonstrategic nuclear weapons, Donilon said. "A priority will be to address tactical nuclear weapons." No previous arms control agreement has included such provisions.

"We are ready to begin discussions soon with Russia on transparency and confidence-building measures that could provide the basis for creative verification measures in the next round of U.S.-Russia nuclear arms reductions," Donilon said.

To ensure a safe, secure and effective nuclear arsenal that will facilitate arms reductions, the Obama administration intends to invest \$85 billion in the nation's nuclear infrastructure over the next 10 years, Donilon said. "If Congress approves the president's funding program for the nuclear complex, it allows us to reduce the size of our nuclear stockpile because we will be able to maintain a robust hedge against technical problems with a much smaller reserve force," Donilon said, adding that the arsenal is "necessary to defend the U.S. and our allies and partners for as long as nuclear weapons exist."

Paralleling the Russia discussions, President Obama is committed to deploying an effective missile-defense system to defend the United States and its allies against threats from such countries as Iran and North Korea, Donilon said. He cited the Phased Adaptive Approach, which provides a more effective and timely response to missile threats, an approach embraced by NATO at the Lisbon summit in November 2010, and widely regarded as a substantial improvement over the prior program, according to Donilon.

To advance the second element of the president's Prague agenda — nonproliferation — the administration is working with the International Atomic Energy Agency to ensure inspections and verifications, while tightening international sanctions against Iran and North Korea.

The administration is committed to working with both political parties in the Senate to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Ratification would serve America's national security interests by strengthening the legal and political barriers to a resumption of nuclear testing, "which would fuel the nuclear buildup in Asia," Donilon said.

Donilon also cited President Obama's support for a new

international treaty, the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT), designed to verifiably end the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons.

To meet the third element of the Prague agenda, preventing nuclear terrorism by strengthening international cooperation on nuclear security, the administration has set a global work plan to secure all vulnerable nuclear materials within four years. An interim goal is to demonstrate significant progress by the next Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul, South Korea, in 2012.

The fourth element of President Obama's Prague agenda is to develop new mechanisms to support the growth of safe and secure nuclear power in ways that reduce the spread of dangerous technologies. Citing the lessons learned from the Fukushima accident in Japan, Donilon called for all nations with nuclear energy programs to ensure the safe operation of nuclear power plants and safe storage of nuclear waste.

The administration is working with the international community to meet the increased demand for low-carbon sources of electricity and access peaceful nuclear power without increasing the risks of proliferation, Donilon said.

Foreign Aid Advances U.S. Interests, Officials Testify

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — Investments in global health and development are investments in global security, according to testimony presented to the U.S. Congress during consideration of the budget for the next fiscal year. Congress is weighing that calculation at the same time many U.S. citizens and lawmakers are worried about the nation spending beyond its means.

Though foreign assistance amounts to less than 1 percent of the federal budget, there is a widespread public perception that a much higher percentage of national spending goes to other countries. The political outcry to keep those funds in the United States grows to a clamor in difficult budget years.

In that context, the administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Dr. Rajiv Shah, told the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations March 30 that the success of the United States in the world is closely linked to the success and progress of other nations.

"We will save lives, expand global freedom and opportunity and crucially strengthen America's national and economic security," Shah said. Through programs supporting democracy and the expansion of free markets,

Shah said, USAID helps contribute to greater international stability and security overall.

With USAID programs supporting development assistance, or better health, or enhanced agricultural productivity, Shah says his agency is also representing the nation's most important principles.

"USAID is proud to put American values in action — distributing anti-malarial bed nets donated by school children, supporting faith-based organizations that help ease suffering abroad and engaging all Americans in solving the greatest global challenges and generating results," Shah said.

TACKLING HIV/AIDS

The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is a relative newcomer to U.S. foreign assistance spending, initiated in 2003 in response to the global HIV/AIDS epidemic and renewed in 2008.

The Obama administration is seeking more than \$7 billion in the upcoming fiscal year to provide anti-AIDS drugs and care for the infected, and to support campaigns that will prevent the virus spreading further. Ambassador Eric Goosby, U.S. global AIDS coordinator, told the committee March 31 that the numbers tell a story of success: 3.2 million people receiving treatment in 2010; prevention of virus transmission in 600,000 pregnant women; care and support for more than 11 million people, including almost 4 million orphans and vulnerable children.

"When I reflect that each of the numbers represents a real person — with a story, a family, a community," Goosby said, "the impact of this work is too vast to comprehend through numbers alone."

Goosby, who also is a medical doctor, pointed out that global health programs help stabilize societies where illnesses such as HIV, malaria and tuberculosis are so widespread that they have shattered families and communities, orphaned children and increased poverty by disabling young adults. In addition to easing suffering in these populations, Goosby said, PEPFAR contributions have helped build better health care infrastructure in countries where it has been lacking.

"By meeting the HIV challenge, we have naturally created significant health care system improvements that are important in the struggle against other threats, and we have done so without diluting our focus on our own mission of combating HIV/AIDS," Goosby said.

While Shah and Goosby presented impressive statistics about the achievements of health and development programs, the nation is in a difficult budget environment,

reminded Subcommittee Chairwoman Kay Granger of Texas, which makes the administration's requests for increased funding "unrealistic."

"While the goals you have laid out are important, this proposal is expensive," Granger said.

The congressional debate over the budget for the fiscal year that begins October 1 is just getting started, so these officials likely will make their case for global health programs a few more times before a funding level is set.

U.S. Celebrates Open Skies Agreements with 101 Partners

By Phillip Kurata
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood led a celebration in Washington March 30 marking 101 Open Skies aviation agreements concluded since 1992.

Open Skies agreements "open up markets, create jobs, allow people in far-removed countries to interact, share information and build businesses together," Clinton said.

The United States signed its first Open Skies agreement with the Netherlands in 1992, eliminating government interference in commercial airline decisions about routes, capacity and pricing. The Open Skies policy rejects "the outmoded practice of highly restrictive air-services agreements protecting national flag carriers," according to a State Department fact sheet.

"Now, today, we have agreements with countries in every region of the world, from major economies such as Japan, Canada and the European Union, to smaller but equally important countries such as El Salvador and Senegal. And on the president's recent trip to Latin America, we concluded our new agreement with Brazil, our 101st partner," Clinton said.

LaHood said the Open Skies agreements boost economic growth and jobs. In Memphis, Tennessee, for example, LaHood said direct service to Amsterdam accounts for more than \$120 million in economic activity every year and supports more than 2,200 jobs. Direct international service brings Portland, Oregon, more than \$240 million per year in airport and visitor revenue as a result of Open Skies, LaHood said.

The head of the Dallas-Fort Worth airport, Jeffrey Fagan, said the Open Skies policy has brought about direct air connections between Dallas-Fort Worth and 46 international destinations. He said that the 24 Fortune 500 companies that have made the Dallas-Fort Worth area their headquarters have done so in part to take advantage

of the airport's international travel convenience.

The United States now has Open Skies agreements with more than half the countries in the world. LaHood said the U.S. government is working to add additional partnerships.

The Colombian ambassador to the United States, Gabriel Silva, whose country became the 100th Open Skies partner in November 2010, said the aviation agreement strengthens the proposed free-trade agreement between the United States and Colombia. "Open skies and open economies are tied together," he said.

One of Colombia's biggest exports, fresh-cut flowers, makes it to flower stands in the United States faster because shippers have direct access to more American cities. On the U.S. side, exports of computers, electronics and spare parts for all kinds of equipment arrive in Colombia more quickly and efficiently, according to Clinton.

A number of major economies, notably China, Hong Kong, Mexico and South Africa, do not have Open Skies agreements with the United States. When Under Secretary of State for Economic, Energy and Agricultural Affairs Robert Hormats visited Russia recently, he said Russian entrepreneurs told him that what would help them more than anything else would be a direct air connection between Moscow and Silicon Valley in California.

U.S. Urges Côte d'Ivoire to Avoid More Civilian Casualties

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration says Côte d'Ivoire's Laurent Gbagbo is in "a weakened position" as forces loyal to internationally recognized President Alassane Ouattara gain control over more areas of the country, and urges Gbagbo to seize the opportunity to step down from power in a manner that would avoid additional harm to civilians.

Speaking in Washington March 31, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson called on all sides to exercise restraint, saying they should make the protection of civilians "their highest priority." The Ivorians have "already paid a very high price for democracy," he said.

The country's political crisis began in November after Gbagbo refused to honor the results of an internationally recognized presidential election won by Ouattara. The four-month standoff has devastated the country's economy, created a humanitarian crisis and refugee situation that threatens the stability of neighboring

countries, and led to the deaths of more than 400 Ivorian citizens, Carson said.

On March 30, Ouattara's forces captured the city of San Pedro, which is the world's largest port for the export of cocoa, and they are now on the outskirts of the country's largest city, Abidjan. Carson said Gbagbo has an opportunity to end his country's political crisis and avoid urban fighting, which could result in significant civilian casualties.

If Gbagbo does not step aside, "he and those around him ... will have to be held accountable for the actions that they failed to take" to stop the violence, Carson said.

Carson said there is "a clear indication that the military forces of Gbagbo have, in fact, started to disintegrate," with suggestions that there are widespread desertions.

He said the South African government has confirmed that Gbagbo's army chief, Philippe Mangou, has sought asylum in their ambassador's residence in Abidjan.

On March 30, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1975, which imposed sanctions on Gbagbo, his wife and three close associates, and called upon Gbagbo to "immediately step aside" in favor of Ouattara. It also reinforced the mandate of the nearly 10,000-member U.N. Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), urging the U.N. forces to use "all necessary means" to protect civilians, including preventing the use of heavy weapons against them.

Ambassador Susan Rice, the U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations, said March 30 that the resolution is the Security Council's "strongest statement to date" on the political crisis.

"We think this sends a very strong signal, both of Council unity and the international community's determination that the people of Côte d'Ivoire, once and for all, have the opportunity to see a government chosen by the people," Rice said.

In a March 25 message to the people of Côte d'Ivoire, President Obama warned that Gbagbo's continued efforts to cling to power will only result in more violence, including that directed against innocent civilians, as well as more diplomatic and economic isolation.

"President Alassane Ouattara is the democratically elected leader of the nation," Obama said, and he is offering "a peaceful future for all Ivorians — an inclusive government, reunification and reconciliation."

He urged Gbagbo to follow "the example of leaders who reject violence and abide by the will of the people" by

stepping down.

The people of Côte d'Ivoire have a proud past and deserve "a future of hope, not fear," Obama said.

"You deserve leaders like President Ouattara, who can restore your country's rightful place in the world. You deserve the chance to determine your own destiny," the president said.

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